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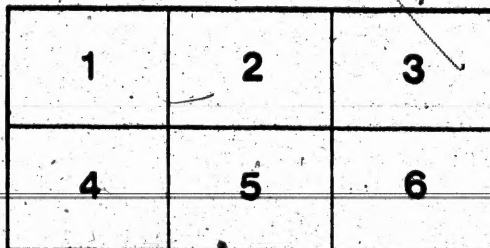
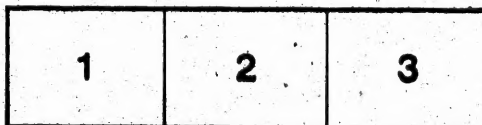
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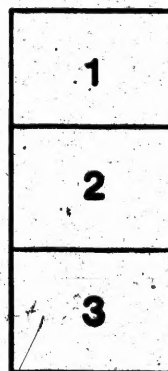
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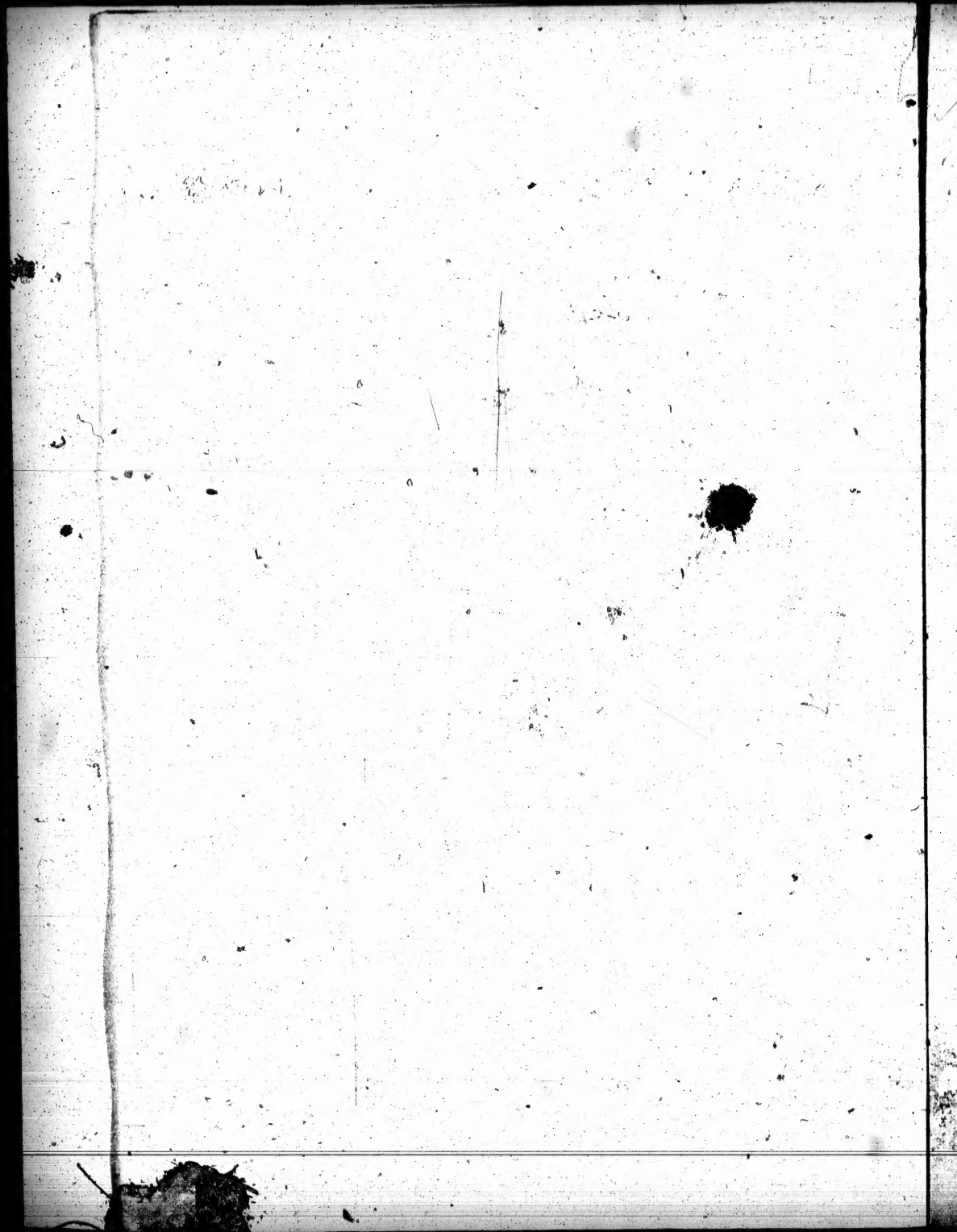
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GOSPEL PREACHING:

A Discourse

PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF THE SYNOD

OF THE

UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

IN TORONTO, JUNE 12, 1859.

BY

WILLIAM AITKEN,

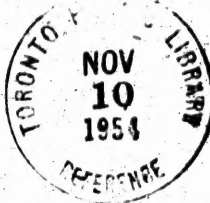
MINISTER OF THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION, SMITH'S FALLS.

TORONTO, C. W.,

JOHN C. GEIKIE, 61 KING STREET EAST.

1859.

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NOTE.—As it is not the practice of the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church to request publication of the Discourses preached at the commencement of its successive Sessions, by the retiring Moderators, the following Discourse, being one of that class, was composed without the slightest expectation that it would ever be published.

Many of the Ministers and Elders, however, in whose hearing it was delivered, having expressed a strong desire to have it in a printed form, it is in deference to that desire committed to the press.

In the course of transcription from the original manuscript, some alterations have been made. These alterations, however, have been, for the most part, merely verbal; and have in no instance been of such consequence as to call for particular specification.

W. A.

SMITH'S FALLS, July 4, 1859.

GOSPEL PREACHING.

FOR CHRIST SENT ME NOT TO BAPTIZE, BUT TO PREACH THE GOSPEL: NOT WITH WISDOM OF WORDS, LEST THE CROSS OF CHRIST SHOULD BE MADE OF NONE EFFECT.—I Cor., i: 17.

THE Gospel had not yet been introduced into Corinth when Paul, soon after his ever-memorable discourse to the Athenians on Mars' Hill, proceeded thither. His apostolic labours in this new field were eminently successful, and a Christian Church was ere long organized.

This was an event of no small moment in its bearing on the advancement of the Redeemer's cause.

The Corinth of that age was a city of recent growth, which had sprung from the ruins of the Corinth of ancient Grecian history, and which, originating in the planting of a Roman colony, had rapidly attained to a high degree of prosperity. Favoured by its peculiar situation it became a great seat of commerce—the well-known Isthmus on which it stood giving it the command of the intercourse by land between the Peloponnesus and the regions lying to the northward; while its harbours on either side, communicating respectively with the Ionian and Ægean Seas, received the traffic both of the eastern and the western worlds. It formed a central point in the direct line of travel between imperial Rome and her Asiatic Provinces; and its public games, of which, from the early times of Hellenic independence and renown, the Isthmus had been the scene, and which thence accordingly derived their distinctive name, attracted multitudes from afar to their triennial celebration. The fame of its schools of philosophy and art, moreover—

not inferior in reputation to those of Athens itself—made it a place of general resort for the votaries of learning. Its population was of the miscellaneous character which might naturally be conjectured to belong to such a city, and while consisting mainly of Greeks and Romans, contained representatives, more or less numerous, of many different nations and tribes, among whom were included not a few of the Hebrew race. Corinth thus offered advantages for the wide and rapid propagation of the Gospel such as were then scarcely to be found connected with any other city on the face of the earth. A religion promulgated there, especially a religion of such novel and extraordinary characteristics as the Gospel, might, on all grounds of reasonable calculation, be reckoned nearly sure of becoming speedily known to the remotest limits of Rome's far-extending rule.

The same reasons which thus rendered it desirable that a Church of Christ should be established in the chief city of Achaia, in like manner rendered it desirable that the Church there established should be one fitted by its character to bear unequivocal and decided testimony to the excellence of the Gospel. At a very early period, however, in the history of the Corinthian Church, notwithstanding the illustrious ministry by which it had been founded, grievous errors and inconsistencies appeared in it, of a description only too well adapted to detract from the value of its example as affecting the furtherance of the christian cause.

The apostolic churches at large had difficulties to contend against—difficulties both of internal constitution and external circumstance, of a kind placing formidable hindrances in the way of the steady maintenance of their purity and peace. Their membership—partly Jewish, partly Gentile

—comprised elements in many respects uncongenial and antagonistic. The Jew and the Gentile respectively brought into them prejudices—the result of their previous training—which, if resembling in nothing else, were alike at least in obstinate tenaciousness. Low and unspiritual notions of religion generally—misconceptions of the relation of the Gospel economy to that by which it was preceded, and deep-felt reluctance to an entire abandonment of the peculiarities of the ancient system—the speculations of a vain and deceitful philosophy—the differences of sects and parties, and the animosities hence engendered—the abounding wickedness, also, of an age which if paralleled was assuredly never exceeded in immorality and licentiousness—these and such like causes, operating from without and within, conspired to disturb the harmony of those primitive christian societies—to unsettle and corrupt their doctrine, and relax the strictness of their moral practice.

To the dangers springing from the various sources just indicated the Church in Corinth was in no ordinary measure exposed; and the consequences can be readily traced in the irregularities and disorders which showed themselves within its pale. Among the evils which hence arose, the connection in which our text occurs leads us especially to notice that schismatic spirit to which, in the immediately preceding portion of this chapter, the apostle so emphatically refers, and whose malignant operation the Church of Christ, in all subsequent generations, even as then, has had so much reason to deplore. In the Corinthian Church this unhappy spirit wrought with exceeding virulence. Concerning those who composed its fellowship only too truly had it been reported to the apostle, as he felt bound to testify, “that there were contentions among them.” So far from exhibiting a visible agreement corresponding to

those hidden ties which form a bond of union ^{the most} intimate and hallowed among all the true disciples of Jesus, they were separated—the persons concerning whom this testimony was delivered—into a number of sections, each of which ranked under its distinctive head. One professed to hold peculiarly by Paul, another by Apollos, and a third by Cephas, while a fourth, running, as it would seem, into precisely the opposite extreme, declared itself to be for Christ alone—in a sense, it may be presumed, involving an undue disparagement of those servants of the Redeemer whom the rest so improperly exalted.

The state of things thus obtaining was to the apostle an occasion of deep sorrow, and it called forth his pointed rebuke as dishonouring to the Saviour, and evincing a gross misapprehension and perversion of the just claims of the human instruments employed in the promulgation of His religion. For himself, Paul utterly repudiated the false honour which the misdirected regard of his friends in Corinth would have conferred upon him in constituting him the chief of a party, and so placing him in a position of vain rivalry to certain of his fellow-labourers in the work of the Gospel, and in a position of impious rivalry even to his Blessed Master, the common Lord of all. "Is Christ," he demands, "divided?—was Paul crucified for you?—or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" As matters had fallen out it was a source of satisfaction to him to reflect that only in two or three instances altogether the baptismal rite had been administered by him in the Corinthian Church. He recalled this with satisfaction, because thus he had been saved from furnishing even the semblance of a pretext for the allegation which might otherwise have been made, that he baptized in his own name. "I thank God," he exclaims, "that I baptized none of you but

Crispus and Gaius, and I baptized also the household of Stephanas; besides, I know not whether I baptized any other." Why so very few among the Corinthians had received baptism at his hands, notwithstanding the lengthened period of his sojourning among them, we are not particularly informed; but this general explanation of the fact is given, that to the office to which he had been divinely designated pertained a higher function—one therefore entitled to his chief consideration. "Christ," he affirms, "sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel;" and with respect to the mode in which the ministry which thus he had received was to be fulfilled, it is added, "not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."

In the words before us, therefore, we have Paul's account of the great duty of his apostolic mission, and next of the manner in which that duty must be discharged. And in the sequel of this discourse, after some observations on these particulars in exposition of the text, we shall request your attention to several remarks obviously suggested by it, and having a practical bearing on the work of the Christian Ministry.

I. First of all, then, we have in the text Paul's account of the great duty of his apostolic mission. "Christ," he declares, "sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel."

Paul's apostolic authority was an authority derived directly from the Redeemer himself. It was Christ who sent him. The circumstances, indeed, under which he received his call to the apostleship differed widely from those under which his fellow-apostles were called. But though there were some—even in the Corinthian Church founded by his instrumentality—who took advantage of this difference to question the validity of his title to the

apostleship; and though in self-abasing remembrance of his early hostility to Christ and His cause—while acknowledging that it was “as one born out of due time” that he had seen the Lord—he felt constrained to confess himself the “least of the apostles,” and as “not meet to be called an apostle”—yet by the grace of God he was what he was, and none could advance a more unimpeachable claim to the apostolic dignity than he. As an apostle Christ had sent him. He was His ambassador—His delegate.

And his mission as thus sent, according to the representation here given, was a mission “not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel.” Of course this announcement is not to be taken with such absolute strictness as if it were intended to import, that the administration of the baptismal rite was something entirely aside from the proper business of his apostolic office. No such exclusive meaning was designed. Elsewhere, making use of similar phraseology, Paul describes himself as speaking, in the enunciation of the Gospel, “not as pleasing men, but God,” the trier of men’s hearts. He did not thus, however, wish it to be understood that, in preaching the Gospel, he cared positively nothing whether he pleased men or not. We know, on the contrary, that within the limits prescribed by a good conscience, and for a worthy end, he was ready to “become all things to all men.” All he desired was, by a strongly significant form of speech, to intimate that the pleasing of men was to him as a thing of no account in comparison of the pleasing of God. And so here—all he would affirm is—in a manner of like significance—that in the work of his mission, baptizing was an inconsiderable matter as compared with the preaching of the Gospel. Christ sent him not so much to baptize, as rather—unspeakably rather—to preach the Gospel. In accordance

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with what Paul thus declares, while in the general apostolic commission, baptizing is specified, it is yet introduced in such a manner as may be conceived to indicate its subordinate importance viewed in relation to the other duty there at the same time enjoined,—“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” In the ordinary practice, moreover, of those to whom this commission was addressed, the inferior consequence attached to baptizing would appear to have been distinctly signified by this service being to a great extent devolved on others.

Paul's apostolic mission, then, was a mission in which the preaching of the Gospel was to have the decided precedence of baptizing. Christ sent him not to baptize—save as holding baptizing secondary to the preaching of the Gospel, and making that his principal concern. Christ sent him not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel—literally, to evangelize—to proclaim the good news—the glad tidings of great joy—the good news, the glad and joyful tidings, that God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son for its redemption—that God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing to men their trespasses—the good news, the glad and joyful tidings of salvation to our apostate and ruined race—salvation with eternal glory—a salvation in all the fulness and variety of its imperishable benefits, free and accessible to all—not only to them that are Jews by nature, but also to sinners of the Gentiles—salvation through a suffering and crucified, a risen and exalted Redeemer, by faith in His name. Such, in Paul's view, was the great work which as an apostle, had been given him to do—to publish in a sin-stricken and perishing world that good news—that glad tidings of great joy, the

"blessed evangel of God's redeeming love. And the representation thus given is confirmed and illustrated by the terms of the special commission, which, as we learn, from the history of his conversion in his unrivalled defence before King Agrippa, he received from the Lord Jesus. "Rise, and stand upon thy feet," was the command addressed to him by the ascended Saviour, when arrayed in more than sun-like glory, He revealed himself to him on the way to Damascus—"for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those in which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

Thus Paul was delegated not to baptize, but to evangelize. And how nobly was the task so allotted to him performed! With what intense earnestness of spirit—with what self-denying devotedness—with what invincible resolution—did he apply himself to its execution! Shrink-
ing from no toil nor hardship—dismayed by no difficulty nor danger—dauntlessly confronting suffering and death in their most painful and appalling forms—"approving himself as the minister of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings." "Of the Jews," he could testify, "five times received I forty stripes save one, thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine

own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." But "none of these things moved him,"—his Christian magnanimity bore him triumphantly through them all—"neither counted he his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."

II. But in the text, we have an account not only of the great duty of Paul's apostolic mission, but likewise of the manner in which that duty was to be discharged. Sent by Christ not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel—he must do so, "not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."

His preaching was to be "not with wisdom of words." As to the precise meaning to be attached to this expression, there has been some difference of opinion. Without, however, adverting particularly to the various explanations which have consequently been proposed, it is obvious to remark, that the apostle is by no means to be understood as thereby intimating that the verbal form in which the truth of the Gospel might be set forth, was to be reckoned a matter of pure indifference.

Neither, further, is he to be understood in a sense which would preclude the use of human eloquence, when it might serve more effectually to impress the truth on the minds of Gospel-hearers.

The apostle, as we conceive, makes allusion in the expression in question, to the philosophic subtleties and rhetorical artifices current in the Corinthian schools, the

employment of which, by a public speaker, however it might excite admiration of his own ingenuity and taste, and throw a certain specious embellishment around his subject, could not avail in the enunciation of the truth to render it more perspicuous or impressive, but must, on the contrary, tend to involve it in obscurity, and impair its proper efficacy. All such oratorical refinements and affectations the apostle felt bound to repudiate. Sent to preach the Gospel, and having no extreme dislike—any more than incompetency—to draw upon the resources of human learning, when it could with advantage be consecrated to that holy service, yet was he not to preach the Gospel with wisdom of words, after the manner of the philosophers and rhetoricians of the schools.

The special reason assigned is this—"lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."

Since the days of the apostle, to the cross of Christ, in fabled substance, and in mere unsubstantial form, a blind superstition, given over to strong delusion to believe a lie, has attributed miraculous virtues and peculiar sanctity, making it consequently the object of an idolatrous veneration. It can hardly be necessary to remark, that the cross of Christ in this sense, is not that which Paul here intended. Nothing, assuredly, could be more thoroughly repugnant to all his deepest convictions and feelings, than such a monstrous perversion of religious homage.

More than once in scripture, by the cross is signified, persecutions and sufferings incurred and submitted to in the Redeemer's cause and for his sake. "If any man will come after me," were accordingly the words of Jesus, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." The cross, however, in this use of the term, is

manifestly the cross of the Christian disciple—not the cross of Him who thus prescribes the indispensable condition of Christian discipleship.

In the text, on the contrary, the cross spoken of, is Christ's own cross. It is the sufferings which He himself endured—sufferings issuing in the awful decease, which He accomplished at Jerusalem, to which that cross bears reference; and it may be regarded as denoting generally the truth of scripture in relation to the sufferings of Christ, the Gospel doctrine of Christ crucified.

Conformably to the view of the cross of Christ just presented, the manner in which it is here brought forward, evidently implies its high and vital importance in the preaching of the Gospel. Not with wisdom of words must the Gospel be preached, and why?—lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect, lest it should be rendered vain and ineffective, lest it should be prevented from duly exerting its proper influence, and hindered of its proper glory.

To the sufferings of Christ on the cross pertained a character strictly peculiar—these sufferings were vicarious and expiatory. When He expired on the tree of shame and woe, He did not die as any mere mortal might have died, being appointed to so terrible a doom—Christ crucified was in His death a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of our fallen and rebellious race. In His cross stands revealed, the wondrous method devised by ineffable love and unsearchable wisdom for the salvation of sinners of mankind—a method of salvation fraught with glory to God in the highest, while breathing peace and good-will to men. The exhibition of this method of salvation is indispensable to the accomplishment of the great end, so far as sinners are concerned, contemplated in the preaching of

the Gospel. Hence the language of the apostle in a subsequent verse of the present chapter—"after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching, (that is, by the preaching of the cross—"to them that perish foolishness,") to save them that believe."

To make the cross of Christ of none effect, therefore, was virtually to make of none effect the Gospel of man's salvation altogether—thwarting and frustrating the ineffably gracious design for which it was to be preached to perishing sinners. With reason, then, might the apostle feel himself laid under an imperative obligation to reject in his preaching the wisdom of words, as adapted to lead to a consequence so disastrous. And every one conversant with his writings knows how thoroughly in keeping with such an obligation was the spirit which he habitually cherished. With what deep energy does he once and again give utterance to that spirit. Thus, in the commencement of the following chapter—"I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." And again in his Epistle to the Galatians—"God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ."

III. Having, in the foregoing observations endeavoured to unfold the meaning of the text, we have now, as we proposed, to request your attention to some remarks evidently suggested by it, and having a practical bearing on the work of the Christian Ministry.

1. Our first remark is—that the religion of the Gospel is a religion which seeks to benefit mankind especially by

means of the truth—attaching comparatively little weight to positive rites, and formal observances.

From the representation given by Paul of his apostolic mission, it is perfectly clear that he was as far as possible from regarding the rite of baptism as a thing of such paramount importance as it came to be reckoned in after ages, and as it is by so many reckoned still. It is manifest that he recognized in it no peculiar virtue such as could place it on a level of equality with the preaching of the Gospel, still less such as could elevate it to a position of higher consideration. And how could he have spoken of it as he does if he had conceived it an indispensable prerequisite to salvation—ensuring to all made the subjects of it, emancipation from the thralldom of Satan, admission into the family of God, exemption from the coming wrath, and an heritage in heaven?

Baptism is a sacred symbol, and the importance of that which thus it represents cannot be over-estimated—namely, the cleansing efficacy of the Redeemer's blood, the regenerating grace of His Holy Spirit—the grace which must be experienced—the change which must be undergone, by a sinner ere he can enter into the kingdom of God. But the administration of the rite determines nothing as to the person to whom it is administered having or not having experienced that grace and undergone that change. There resides in it no inherent power to communicate so precious a benefit; neither is there any such connection established between the outward sign and the blessing which it denotes as that the reception of the former secures the bestowal of the latter. It is a pledge, indeed, of the grace signified to those for whom it is in sovereign mercy destined, and in whom the conditions according to which it is imparted are fulfilled. But in so far as it may be sup-

posed fitted, in its own nature, to procure for any one that grace, it is simply by means of the truth of which it is emblematic—apprehended—believed—embraced—truth much more clearly, fully and effectively—if not with the same sensible accompaniment—presented in the preaching of the Gospel.

The religion of Jesus is, in reality as little as may be, a religion of positive rites and external forms. To view it differently is to misconceive it in a manner as inexcusable as it is apt to prove deadly. Its chief purpose, in regard to sinners of mankind, is to achieve their salvation: and this purpose it aims at accomplishing by the instrumentality of the truth, received by faith into the sinner's heart, and—applied by the Holy Spirit—moulding and governing his character and life. Its sacraments can, of themselves, contribute to the desired result only as symbolic exhibitions of the truth which makes wise unto salvation. To impute to them—whether baptism or the Lord's Supper—an intrinsic saving virtue—distinct from the influence of the truth which they embody—is a senseless superstition and a most perilous delusion—perilous, most of all, when it is resorted to, as so frequently it is, as a ground of confidence in the extremity of a dying hour.

Let those, therefore, who are appointed to preach the Gospel, as they would not neglect a solemn duty—to which particular circumstances may lend a special force of obligation—earnestly admonish their hearers against being misled by so fatal a deception; instructing them, as among the first principles of the oracles of God, that by no mystical efficacy of sacraments, by no mere outward observances, are the blessings of salvation to be obtained; but that, if they would be saved, it must be by grace through faith—the faith of the truth as it is in Jesus—

forming the bond of a living union between Him and the believing soul—working by love, and purifying the heart.

2. From what has just been advanced, we are naturally led, in continuation, to notice what the text very evidently further implies—namely, the surpassing importance of the preaching of the Gospel as the grand appointed instrumentality for the presentation of the truth to the minds of men.

Paul, it is easy to perceive, was disposed to magnify his office as a Gospel preacher, and with a propriety not to be questioned. To preach the Gospel had he, above all, been divinely sent; and thus, mainly, were sinners to be instructed in that truth, the knowledge of which was essential to the salvation of their souls.

Not unfrequently we have occasion to hear preaching (that is, the public enunciation of Gospel truth, in contradistinction from all diverse and more private methods of bringing that truth under the consideration of mankind,) referred to in such terms as to indicate quite another and lower estimate of it than had been formed by the great apostle. Preaching, we are sometimes told, constitutes but a small part of a minister's appropriate work; and we are led to infer, if we are not expressly assured, that the good thus to be effected is of inconsiderable account as compared with that which may be effected by dealing with separate individuals or by family visitation.

That there is here a grave mistake, is not to be doubted; and the mischievous tendency of such representations, as affecting the obligations both of those who preach and those who hear the Gospel, is apparent at a glance. It would not be difficult, from the nature of the case, to shew that to Gospel preaching pertain advantages such as belong to no other mode of inculcating the truth. It is

enough, however, to observe, that, to such disparaging estimates of that preaching as those to which we have adverted, the Word of God gives no countenance whatever, but, on the contrary, teaches us to regard it as the principal means appointed by Christ for bringing the truth effectively to bear, on the souls of men. And here, as every where else, it will be found, in the final result, that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

Those, therefore, who have been put in trust with the Gospel may warrantably, after the example of the apostle of the Gentiles, magnify their office as Gospel preachers, and should be deeply concerned, in this particular, to acquit themselves as "good ministers of Jesus Christ"—"giving attendance to exhortation, to doctrine"—"studying to shew themselves approved unto God, workmen who need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"—endeavouring, "by manifestation of the truth, to commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God"—while those who would undervalue and set lightly by their preaching are to be warned, that in contemning it, they "despise not man," nor man's device, but God and His ordinance—an ordinance, the dishonouring of which must involve the more aggravated a culpability—that it is one instituted in unspeakable mercy, that thereby they may be brought to the knowledge of the truth and be saved.

3. We proceed to remark still further, that the great element of power in the preaching of the Gospel—that on which its saving efficacy is mainly dependant—is its exhibition of the cross of Christ.

Therefore was Paul to preach the Gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the influence of the cross should be

obstructed; or lest, by the ascription to other causes of salutary effects justly attributable to it alone, it should fail to receive the honour rightfully its due.

The truth in relation to Christ crucified, Christ offered on the cross as an atoning sacrifice, in the room, and on behalf, of sinners of mankind—this constitutes the grand distinguishing truth of the Gospel. Such is the place which it occupies there, that all that is strictly peculiar to the Gospel system is dependant on it; so that supposing it to be thence rejected, doctrine after doctrine must necessarily follow till nothing properly characteristic of the Gospel will remain. Contemplated under this aspect, it may be compared to the central orbs in the systems of the material universe which connect the various worlds revolving around them in harmonious and stable relations, and whose annihilation involves the inevitable dissolution of the whole scheme to which each respectively belongs. Or it may be likened to the keystone which binds the arch in its several parts into a compact mass, but on the removal of which the fabric in which it served so essential a purpose, being left without adequate support, falls in pieces.

Such being the position of the cross of Christ—the doctrine of Christ crucified—in the Gospel system, whatever influence the preaching of the Gospel can exert must, directly or indirectly, be referrible principally to that source.

The great design of the Gospel with reference to sinners of our lost race—as we have more than once already intimated—is to save them. And the truth concerning Christ crucified is, by emphatic pre-eminence, the truth which is mighty to save. It is the truth which, intelligently apprehended, and received by faith, and believingly contemplated, justifies the sinner, tranquillizes his guilty conscience,

brings him into a state of acceptance and peace with God, and draws forth his heart in gratitude and love to the Author of his salvation, and which, operating in his soul with the power of a new, a higher, a divine life, promotes the sanctification of his whole nature, and leads on to an ultimate perfect assimilation to the Infinite Purity. With this truth, therefore, distinguishing their preaching, the ministering servants of Christ may go to all the world, and in the Gospel so proclaimed to all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, they shall carry with them a salvation free to all and assured to every one who believeth. On the other hand, this truth being abstracted from their preaching, they cannot be the instruments of salvation to one solitary soul.

This *it* is which imparts to the Gospel and its preaching the might of a divinely adapted suitableness to the exigencies of our spiritual condition—to the urgent necessities and wants of our fallen and degenerate nature. And the history of the Redeemer's Church bears signal testimony to the effective working of the power divine thence derived. As the records of that Church emphatically demonstrate, it is when Christ crucified has been the chief theme of christian preaching—when the cross has been most prominently and conspicuously held forth—that the Gospel has ever exerted the greatest and happiest influence on mankind. We might refer, by way of example, to the first age of christianity, when it was the highest boast of men, like the apostle Paul, that they preached a crucified Saviour, glorying in the cross; and when the word preached grew mightily and prevailed, being attended with a success that has never since been fully paralleled. We might also refer to the time of the Reformation from Popery, when the true doctrine of the cross, after long generations, amid the

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all but universal corruptions of which it had lain for the most part concealed and disregarded, was reproduced and proclaimed anew, with something like the primitive simplicity and zeal, and when the word preached put forth a large measure of its primitive efficiency. And, once more, we might refer to what has been accomplished in times less remote in the field of missionary enterprise—to Gospel triumphs there achieved, serving impressively to demonstrate that the cross can make its attractions felt, even amid the deepest degradation of heathenism and idolatry, and, when all other means have been found ineffectual, can avail to soften and subdue the rudest and most stubborn nature—to melt the hardest and most depraved heart—turning the heathen from his “idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come.”

In the preaching of the Gospel, then—the grand instrumentality appointed for the saving of sinners—the doctrine of the cross, which reveals to men the way of salvation—the sure but only way—ought to have that first place to which, by its unspeakable importance, it has so unquestionable a claim. And those who have been counted faithful to be put into the ministry will best approve their faithfulness as Gospel preachers by giving that doctrine the highest prominence. Herein imitating the example of Paul, they should be able with him to say: “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” And while those who preach the Gospel, if they would minister grace, grace unto salvation, to their hearers, are thus to preach it; with regard to

those who hear, it is in like manner to Christ crucified that they must, above all, direct their believing contemplation if they would be saved. As there is no salvation for sinners but in Christ, so in Him there is salvation only "through faith in His blood"—only through efficacy of His cross, by faith realized.

4. We have to remark once more, that in the preaching of the Gospel human learning is grievously misapplied when it is used in such a way as might tend to counteract the influence of the Redeemer's cross.

This is a manifest deduction from the observations immediately preceding; not less manifestly is it implied in the text. Not with wisdom of words—not in such a manner as might be sanctioned by the schools—would the apostle preach the Gospel, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

Paul, we may feel well assured, entertained no rational prejudices against learning generally; nor was he to be conceived as undervaluing its legitimate applications. He was himself a man of learning, and ready, on fitting occasion, to avail himself of his attainments as such. But much that was taught in the schools of his age was a spurious learning, which could hardly be rated too low. He was aware, moreover, that even a genuine learning might be mischievously employed; and, knowing of what infinite moment it was that the cross of Christ should exert the full measure of its appropriate influence, he felt constrained to reject every mode of preaching the Gospel by which that influence might be impaired. Certainly nothing can be imagined from which he would have shrunk with greater abhorrence than the thought of throwing a shade over the glory of the cross, in order that he might make a vain parade of his scholastic acquirements.

It is not requisite that we should attempt formally to show how desirable it is that those who preach the Gospel should, as we have said the apostle was, be men of learning. Whatever controversy there might at one time be with respect to this point, the advantage of such qualification is now universally admitted. Every true minister of Christ, however, whatever his erudition, will, like the apostle, hold all his acquirements subservient to the influence of His cross, and will assiduously seek that, in the highest possible degree, they may contribute to the enhancement of its attractions and the promotion of His glory.

We have thus, as we proposed, adverted to Paul's account of the great duty of his apostolic mission, and the manner in which that duty was to be discharged, subjoining several observations, suggested by the text, having a practical bearing on the work of the Christian Ministry.

In conclusion,—let those who have been appointed to the office of ministers in the Church of Christ, be entreated to cherish a deep sense of the unspeakable importance of the chief function of their sacred office, namely, the preaching of the Gospel, and of that method of salvation by divine atoning sacrifice, irrespectively of which, their preaching can be productive of little benefit; and let them, with all earnestness, endeavour to “make full proof of their ministry,” and faithfully to “keep that which has been committed to their trust; avoiding profane and vain babblings and oppositions of science, falsely so called,” “in doctrine, showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, which cannot be condemned, that he who is of the contrary part, may be ashamed having no evil thing to say of them.”

And let those to whom the Gospel is preached, be exhorted to lay to heart, the solemn responsibility connected

with the possession of this high privilege, and to take heed how they hear, remembering that if the Gospel avails not to save them, it must entail upon them a more awful condemnation. Let them, above all, beware of trusting for salvation to any other method than that which the Gospel sanctions—the method of salvation, by faith in Him who bare our sins in His own body on the tree, and died that He might redeem us to God by His blood. “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God, for He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

